United Nations A/S-23/PV.1

General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

1st meeting
Monday, 5 June 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Temporary President, the Chairman of the delegation of Namibia

The Temporary President: I declare open the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-23/6)

The Temporary President: I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-23/6, which contains a letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Secretary-General, in which he informs the Assembly that 38 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in this document?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

00-46296 (E)

In accordance with precedents and as recommended by the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory body for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Credentials Committee of the twenty-third special session should have the same membership as that of the fifty-fourth regular session of the Assembly, namely, Austria, Bolivia, China, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I shall consider the Credentials Committee constituted accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: In this connection, I invite the attention of the members of the Assembly to a note verbale from the Secretary-General, dated 13 March 2000, in which it was stated that credentials should be issued for all representatives to the special session, in accordance with rule 27 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. I would urge all members to submit the credentials of representatives to the Secretary-General as soon as possible.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President

The Temporary President: The Commission on the Status of Women, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-third special session, recommends that the twenty-third special session should take place under the presidency of the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth regular session, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia.

I take it that the Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Gurirab President of the General Assembly at its twenty-third session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: I extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab and invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Gurirab took the Chair.

Statement by Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session

The President: I thank all delegations for my unanimous election.

I am delighted to welcome participants to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

Over the last decade, the Assembly has taken on a critical role in its follow-up to the global conferences of the 1990s that have helped shape our common commitments and objectives in areas such as the environment, human rights, population issues, habitat, social development, food security and the concerns of the small island developing States. A special session was held as well on drug control, the relation of drugs to crime and their impact on the global community.

Yet another special session on social development will take place in Geneva later this month. Moreover, next year, the Assembly will convene a special session on HIV/AIDS and another one to review progress towards the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children. The Beijing Conference earned itself the distinction of having been the largest gathering of representatives of Governments, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, with 17,000 in attendance.

Twelve critical areas were identified as the basis for public policy and for implementation as national objectives of Member States, as well as of other stakeholders, with time-bound targets. Specific emphasis was put on poverty reduction; measures against violence and armed conflict; measures promoting education and training, health care, human rights, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and their meaningful participation in the economy, decision-making, power-sharing and the media; and the protection and well-being of the girl child.

Women are bringing their unique concerns to the attention of their Governments for action. These concerns include domestic violence, lack of access to land and property, unequal pay for work of equal value, biased portrayal of their roles in society and laws that perpetuate backward traditional practices.

Women are insisting that all human issues concern them and demand their legitimate role in the quest for solutions, whether it is about shaping the path of globalization, a new international financial architecture, efforts for conflict resolution, peace-making, peacekeeping and peace enforcement or the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security. Women demand to play an active role in dealing with the impact of any new world order and of information technology.

This twenty-third special session of the General Assembly gives us an ideal opportunity to assess how far Member States have come in fulfilling their promises, to address the shortcomings, to face the new challenges and to reaffirm their commitments. The international community can then move forward with renewed dedication and abundant energy to achieve the goal of women's equality and empowerment in all walks of life everywhere, particularly in the developing countries.

Beijing 1995 was called the "conference of commitments. Many Government leaders made specific commitments to strengthen national mechanisms for the benefit of women and to mobilize increased human and financial resources to implement national gender equality policies.

Before us is the latest report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), entitled "Domestic violence against women and girls". Its publication is timely, and I commend UNICEF's Executive Director, my friend Carol Bellamy, and her team for this moving and revealing report.

Many Governments have provided their replies to the General Assembly questionnaire regarding the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The United Nations agencies have likewise accounted for their contributions, and non-governmental organizations have shared their assessment of progress made so far. This and additional information is available to delegations in the Secretary-General's report to the Economic and Social Council, contained in document E/CN.6/2000/PC/2 of 19 January 2000.

Since Beijing, many but hardly all States have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The promise to elaborate an optional protocol to the Convention, on the right to petition the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, was fulfilled last October with the unanimous adoption of such a protocol by the General Assembly. And we now await its entry into force without delay.

The Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, includes gender-based international crimes related to bodily integrity, and the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and for the former Yugoslavia have issued indictments related to sexual violence. Some Governments have also adopted legislation and have committed significant resources for strategies to address gender-based violence against women, especially domestic violence. These are, indeed, noteworthy achievements. But we are not quite there yet. Indeed, as the UNICEF report confirms, there is much to do with a sense of urgency.

Today, the world is bedevilled by endless wars and other armed conflicts. In those situations, women, along with children, are the main targets of hostile acts and abuse by warring States and rebel groups. This cruelty takes various forms, such as: death; abduction of girls into slavery, including sexual slavery; the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war; the total denial of basic rights of women; or revenge inflicted on women out of ethnic hatred. Women and girls have become the real victims in these wars and armed conflicts, the worst of them today in my own continent, Africa. Trafficking in women and girls and their exploitation through prostitution and pornography has become one of the most serious challenges facing the global community. We must condemn these heinous crimes. Better still, we must stop them forthwith.

Moreover, discriminatory laws persist on marriage, on the administration of marital property, and on land and inheritance rights. This not only deprives women of their right to equal status under the law, but also robs them of economic rights and opportunities for advancement. Also, women's health rights remain curtailed by unequal access to health care; maternal and infant mortality remain unacceptably high in many countries; and there are very few effective programmes to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic among women in many parts of the world, especially in Africa.

Women also lag behind men in enjoying work-related rights, whether it is equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, work-related social, health and retirement benefits, or equal opportunities in

access to work, promotion and protection against layoffs.

Women's representation remains low in political and economic life. It generally remains marginal in public and private-sector employment as well as in trade unions. Women are very poorly represented at higher levels of decision-making. In 1999, in only 14 countries was the participation of women in parliament above 25 per cent. Only seven States have a woman head of State, and only 11 women head their countries' Missions to the United Nations. At the international level, only a few women participate in United Nations peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement, including involvement in preventive diplomacy, conflict-resolution negotiations and post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction. Perhaps the most insidious barrier to women's equal participation in leadership roles is the persistence of stereotypes towards women, which perpetuate discrimination and entrenched prejudices.

We still have a long way to go in achieving the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. I believe, however, that there has never been a more propitious time for urgent and speedy progress. In their gallant struggle for equality, women can count allies and partners. Enlightened men, youth and religious leaders are part of their struggle, in ever increasing numbers.

In this context, the consistent role of non-governmental organizations has been indispensable, constructive and creative. On Saturday, I was presented by the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations with a non-governmental organization alternative global report for consideration by Member States during this special session on Beijing + 5. I believe this report has reached all delegations.

We have a number of factors in our favour for a positive outcome of this special session. Women and men, Governments, parliaments and non-governmental organizations have conscientiously prepared for this week over many months. Regional meetings have taken place which have increased the momentum for commitment and accountability. We are all charged with a sense of a new beginning barely six months into the new century. Later, in September, heads of State and Government will assemble in this very Hall for the Millennium Summit. Our collective endeavours here should help shape their deliberations and the final outcome. The Secretary-General has, in his highly praised report, entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000), offered a clear vision for the future and bold ideas that will help ensure that will be a brighter, kinder, more peaceful and prosperous future for all.

At this special session we must strive to live up to the expectations of billions of women in the world. They are not alone in this struggle. Rather, we are all helping to advance ideas, commitments and concerns that have been generated in many parts of the world by many citizens who are genuinely committed to gender equality, peace and development. Our deliberations this week will encourage and strengthen the devotion of all those struggling but brave women. Let us not disappoint them. We have the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as our inspiration and shield in the face of all the odds and uncertainties. Victory is certain in this common struggle.

I call now on the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: Five years ago, representatives and non-governmental organizations went to Beijing to right wrongs and to promote rights, and to show the world that, when women suffer injustice, we all suffer; that when women are empowered, we are all better off. The conference was a success: the result was the Beijing Platform for Action.

Five years later, we have come to New York to review the progress made, and to press for further results. Undoubtedly, there has been progress. Violence against women is now illegal almost everywhere. There has been worldwide mobilization against harmful traditional practices such as so-called honour killings, which I prefer to call shame killings.

In many countries, new health strategies have saved thousands of women's lives. More couples now use family planning than ever before. A record number of women have become leaders and decision-makers — in cabinets, in boardrooms and here at the United Nations.

Above all, more countries have understood that women's equality is a prerequisite for development.

But at the same time, much remains to be done. For instance, in economic terms, the gender divide is still widening. Women earn less, are unemployed more

often and, generally, are poorer than men. Women's work is still largely part-time, informal, unregulated and unstable. The fact that they have productive as well as reproductive roles is still all-too-rarely recognized.

Most countries have yet to legislate in favour of women's rights to own land and other property. Even though most countries have legislated against it, violence against women is still increasing, both in the home and in new types of armed conflict which target the civilian population, with women and children as the first casualties.

Of the 110 million children who are not in school, two thirds are girls, and more girls than boys drop out of school early.

Beside those old challenges still unmet, there are new ones. Let me give two examples. First, the spread of AIDS, which is taking a devastating toll on women and girls. In the worst-hit cities of southern Africa, 40 per cent of pregnant women are HIV-positive, and more than 1 child in 10 has lost its mother to AIDS. Grandmothers are caring for orphans, and young girls are kept out of school to care for sick relatives. The social fabric that women have worked so hard to hold together is being destroyed. Secondly, trafficking of women and children, an outrage dating back to biblical times, has now become a worldwide plague.

These challenges demand immediate action. I have asked Member States, when they gather for the Millennium Summit in September, to adopt specific goals for halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for a concerted international campaign against trafficking, through a rights-based approach and the development of a solid legal regime. All of these challenges, old and new, are part of the complex, interconnected world we now live in. They can be met only if we enable women to build on the best this new world has to offer, rather than condemn them to suffer the worst of it.

That means, above all, that women must be educated and enabled to play their part in the global economy. It is lack of education that denies girls the information they need to protect themselves against HIV, and it is often the lack of job prospects that forces women to risk infection through early sexual relations.

Equally, it is the absence of economic opportunity that leads many women to want to migrate, and thus become a target for trafficking. Their lack of education will make them vulnerable to trafficking, however much we legislate against it. In other words, education is both the entry point into the global economy and the best defence against its pitfalls. Globalization involves technological changes which favour more highly skilled workers over less skilled ones. This is widening even further the gap between men's and women's earnings. Only education will enable women to close the gap.

Already, large numbers of women are engaged in global production, from textiles to data processing. But most of them work in appalling conditions, for near-starvation wages. This will change only when women are making economic decisions, as managers, entrepreneurs, employers, labour leaders and employment lawyers, and when they are making social and political decisions, as community leaders, negotiators, judges and Cabinet ministers.

Already, women form the main agricultural labour force, in Africa and many other parts of the world. Yet most women are still denied the right to credit, land ownership and inheritance. Their labour goes unrecognized and unrewarded. Their needs are not given priority. Their roles, even in household decision-making, are restricted. Here, too, education can make the difference, enabling women to champion their sisters' rights to land, to credit, to marketing facilities and technology, and to an equal say in land reform.

Once they are educated and integrated into the workforce, women are better equipped to choose the time they marry and the number of children they have. They and their children can get better nutrition, health care and education. Their example will inspire others, as parents get the message that girls are worth investing in at least as much as boys. Indeed, study after study has confirmed that there is no development strategy more beneficial to society as a whole, women and men alike, than one which involves women as central players.

I hope that in the course of this century, we will also prove that the best strategy of conflict prevention is to expand the role of women as peacemakers. In the United Nations itself, we must find ways to appoint more women in peacekeeping and peacemaking positions. That is why, in my millennium report, and again at the World Education Forum, I challenged Governments to make girls' education their priority.

Indeed, I believe that implementing the Beijing Platform for Action will be crucial to achieving all the millennium goals I have asked the world's leaders to adopt on behalf of all the peoples of the world.

Five years ago, you went to Beijing with a simple statement: "We are not guests on this planet. We belong here." Five years on, I would venture that we all know this is an understatement. I hope this session will put the world on notice not only that women belong on this planet, but that the future of this planet depends on women.

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Report of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/S-23/2 and Add.1 and.2 (Parts I-IV))

The President: I give the floor to the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, Ms. Christine Kapalata of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Ms. Kapalata (Chairperson of the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly): It gives me great honour and pleasure to present to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly the report of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", contained in document A/S-23/2.

At the outset, may I extend a warm welcome to the many leaders and representatives of Governments, cabinets and civil society attending this very significant meeting. This special session provides us with the opportunity to review and assess the progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action and to identify further actions to guide Governments and other relevant actors in their endeavour to turn promises into action. This is indeed a great historic responsibility we all share.

The Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee for the special session has been working diligently to ensure that the session will in fact contribute towards moving the agenda for the advancement of women and gender equality forward. The preparations for the five-year review started immediately after the Beijing Conference with the multi-year work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women for the period 1996 to 1999. During that period the Commission devoted its attention to the review and analysis of the implementation of the Platform in its 12 critical areas of concern. This review resulted in the adoption of resolutions and agreed conclusions containing recommendations for accelerated implementation. The agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women provided invaluable guidance to the work of the Preparatory Committee in designing and discussing the outcome document on further actions and initiatives.

The preparatory process, although difficult at times, was transparent and participatory, allowing for the full participation of all Member States and observers as well as representatives of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and civil society. The intergovernmental consultations before, during and after the third session of the Preparatory Committee, in March 2000, were intensive and challenging. Most will remember the gruelling hours we spent during that time. With the commitment and concerted effort of the delegations, the Preparatory Committee successfully adopted the Political Declaration, which itself is a testimony to the determination and political will of the Member States to fully implement the strategic objectives of the Platform. The Preparatory Committee also extended the opportunity to participate in the special session to non-governmental organizations created since the Beijing Conference, thereby reaffirming its commitment to an inclusive and transparent process for the partnership between Governments and civil society.

I would like to express my gratitude to all non-governmental organizations, those that are here as well as those that could not make it, for the strong dedication they have displayed and for their firm stand behind the principle of gender equality. It is the ownership of the agenda for gender equality by women and men themselves that has made the women's conferences so unique.

One of the major outcomes of the four World Conferences that started in Mexico in 1975 is that they have put into motion an irreversible process: the

struggle for gender equality. Ms. Gertrude Mongela — the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, who is in the Hall today — declared during the Beijing Conference that there is no turning back. Women around the world have hopes and expectations today that they never had before. The idea of a world free of violence and poverty, in which there are opportunities to expand one's life chances, need no longer be an unreachable dream. The unanimous adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by 189 Governments five years ago firmly established that the highest priority in those countries is to ensure the realization of women's advancement and equality. The special session is another step forward in this regard.

The review process shows that we have many accomplishments to celebrate. However, we must pause and acknowledge with sadness that multiple forms of persisting inequalities continue to plague the world and to act as obstacles to real progress towards gender equality, development and peace. In the age of globalization, the disparities between the poor and the rich at all levels are widening, and it is women and children who suffer most from the growing poverty. Unless the root causes of inequalities are addressed through policies and programmes at national and international levels, our collective efforts thus far will go by the wayside. We, the Member States, have an obligation to ensure that the further actions and initiatives for the full implementation of the Platform for Action are fully matched with the necessary financial resources, including through official development assistance, as well as through the gender mainstreaming of all budgetary processes.

Despite all of the efforts of the Preparatory Committee, many paragraphs in the document that we have before us remain outstanding. Therefore, we will continue with our deliberations in the Ad Hoc Committee of the session. Agreement on these issues will require genuine political will and responsible political decisions, in a spirit of partnership and cooperation. I sincerely hope that the leaders of the nations attending the session will play their collective part, which will eventually help all of us advance the cause of the world's women. I am confident that consensus will be reached on the remaining paragraphs of the text.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge with thanks the hard work of my predecessors and the contributions of my colleagues in the Bureau, who have been making many sacrifices in the course of the negotiation period. They have been making a true team effort in our work.

The President: The General Assembly is grateful to the Chairperson of the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and to those who participated in the Preparatory Committee for their efforts to get the special session off to a good start.

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the session

Draft decision II (A/S-23/2)

The President: Members are invited to turn to draft decision II, recommended by the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the Preparatory Committee of the twenty-third special session in its report contained in document A/S-23/2.

Draft decision II is entitled "Organizational arrangements for the twenty-third session of the General Assembly". May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision II?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President: On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Preparatory Committee, the following arrangements shall apply to the twenty-third special session:

The Vice-Presidents of the twenty-third special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly.

The Vice-Presidents of the fifty-fourth regular session are the following Member States: Algeria, Bolivia, China, the Congo, Côte'Ivoire, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, Grenada, Iceland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Lithuania, Monaco, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Seychelles, Tajikistan, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those States

Vice-Presidents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the Chairpersons of the Main Committees of the twenty-third special session, the Chairpersons of the Main Committees of the fifty-fourth regular session shall serve in the same capacity at the special session. The Chairpersons of the Main Committees at the fifty-fourth regular session are the following: First Committee: Mr. Raimundo Gonzalez of Chile; Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee): Mr. Sotirios Zackheos of Cyprus; Second Committee: Mr. Roble Olhaye of Djibouti; Third Committee: Mr. Vladimir Galuška of the Czech Republic; Fifth Committee: Ms. Penny Wensley of Australia; Sixth Committee, Mr. Phakiso Mochochoko of Lesotho.

If there is no objection, I take it that the Assembly decides to elect by acclamation those representatives chairpersons of the Main Committees at the twenty-third special session.

It was so decided.

The President: As concerns the Second Committee, the Chairman of the Second Committee has informed me that, in his absence, he has designated Mr. Giovanni Brauzzi of Italy, Vice-Chairman of the Second Committee, as Acting Chairman of that Committee for the duration of the special session.

In adopting the recommendations of the preparatory committee, the Assembly has established an ad hoc committee of the whole, which will be designated as Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Third Special Session.

In accordance with the recommendations of the preparatory committee just adopted by the General Assembly, the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole will be a full member of the General Committee of the twenty-third special session.

Concerning the election of the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, the preparatory committee recommends that its Chairperson, Ms. Christine Kapalata of the United Republic of Tanzania, serve in the same capacity in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly at its twenty-third special session to elect her by acclamation Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Ms. Christine Kapalata on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf and wish her well in the important and onerous responsibilities that she has just assumed.

The General Committee of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly has now been fully constituted.

We turn now to matters concerning the participation of speakers other than Member States in the work of the special session.

On the basis of the decision just taken by the General Assembly, observers may make statements in the debate in plenary.

States members of the specialized agencies of the United Nations that are not members of the United Nations — namely, the Cook Islands, the Holy See, Niue, Switzerland and Tuvalu — may participate in the work of the twenty-third special session in the capacity of observers.

Associate members of the regional commissions — namely, American Samoa, Anguilla, Aruba, the British Virgin Islands, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong China, Macau China, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Niue, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands — may participate in the special session in the same capacity of observer that applied to their participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Without creating a precedent for other special sessions of the General Assembly, heads of United Nations programmes, specialized agencies and other entities in the United Nations system may make statements in the debate in plenary and representatives of the United Nations system may make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Given the availability of time, a limited number of non-governmental organizations that are in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council may make statements in the debate in plenary.

In this regard, I should like to inform the Assembly that consultations are still ongoing regarding the list of selected non-governmental organizations. As soon as the list is ready, it will be presented to the Assembly for its approval.

I should further like to inform members that representatives of non-governmental organizations may also make statements in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

These arrangements shall not create a precedent for other special sessions of the General Assembly.

In accordance with the decision just taken by the Assembly, and without creating a precedent for other special sessions of the General Assembly, the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will be invited to participate in the debate in plenary.

In accordance with the decision just adopted by the General Assembly, there will be 10 plenary meetings over the five-day period, with two meetings per day from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

In view of the large number of representatives already inscribed on the list of speakers for the debate in plenary, I should like to inform members that I intend to start the plenary meetings promptly at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

In this connection, I would like to assure the Assembly that I shall be in the chair punctually at the scheduled time. I sincerely hope that all delegations will make a special effort to cooperate in this regard.

With regard to the length of statements in the debate in plenary, I should like to remind delegates that, on the basis of the decision just adopted by the Assembly, statements in the debate in plenary should not exceed seven minutes.

In connection with the time limits, a light system has been installed at the speaker's rostrum that functions as follows: a green light will be activated at the start of the speaker's statement; an orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the seven minutes; a red light will be activated when the seven-minute limit has elapsed.

I should like to appeal to speakers in the debate in plenary to cooperate in observing the time limits of their statements, so that all those inscribed on the list of speakers for a given meeting will be heard at that meeting.

I should now like to draw the attention of delegates to a matter concerning the participation of Palestine, in its capacity as observer, in the sessions and work of the General Assembly.

Members will recall Assembly resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998 and its annex, as well as a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/1002, which outlines the Secretary-General's understanding of the implementation of the modalities annexed to the resolution.

I should like to draw the Assembly's attention in particular to paragraph 6 of the annex to resolution 52/250, which reads as follows:

> "The right to make interventions, with a precursory explanation or the recall of relevant General Assembly resolutions being made only once by the President of the General Assembly at the start of each session of the Assembly."

Accordingly, for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the observer of Palestine will participate in the work of the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998, with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any intervention by Palestine in this special session.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

The President: The provisional agenda of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly is contained in document A/S-23/1, which has been recommended for adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women, acting as the preparatory body of the twenty-third special session, in draft decision I of its report (A/S-23/2). In order to expedite its work, the Assembly may wish to consider the provisional agenda directly in plenary meeting without referring it to the General Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to this procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/S-23/1?

It was so decided.

The President: Regarding the allocation of items, on the basis of the decision taken by the General Assembly, all the items on the agenda are to be considered directly in plenary meetings. In addition, items 8 and 9 have also been allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-third special session for consideration, on the understanding that the debate on items 8 and 9 shall take place in the plenary.

Under items 8 and 9, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole will consider a text entitled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action", which is contained in document A/S-23/2/Add.2, parts I to IV.

Agenda items 8 and 9

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: The Assembly will now begin its debate on agenda items 8 and 9.

The Assembly will first hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia.

Ms. Njie-Saidy (Gambia): I would like to convey, first and foremost, the sincere appreciation of His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Gambia, Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, and of the people and the entire Government of the Gambia for the kind invitation that has been extended to me and to the rest of my delegation to attend this special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

Please allow me, Sir, to extend to you, on behalf of my delegation, my heartfelt congratulations on your election as President of this special session. I wish also, in the same vein, to congratulate Mr. Kofi Annan and his able staff for the excellent preparatory work carried out to ensure the successful holding of this special session.

The contribution women are making to all facets of human development, both at the national and international levels, remains, of course, a source of great pride to all of us. The close of the twentieth century showed that women the world over have made tremendous strides in all spheres of development — traditional and non-traditional — in science, technology, politics, business, finance, health, education, culture and, of course, the arts. Indeed, some of the monumental achievements women have registered and continue to register the world over in all these spheres of development and human endeavour are a source of great inspiration to all of us.

It is in this context that this special session should examine the role of women as a social group in the new millennium and how to achieve genuine gender equality while at the same time pursuing, of course, the realization of international development and peace for all.

It is also worthy of note that the Beijing Conference on Women, held five years ago in 1995, ushered in a new awareness the world over in dealing with issues relating to women in development, gender equality and the recognition of the rights and privileges of women in society.

Indeed, the ripple effects of the pronouncements made at the Beijing Conference and the adoption and implementation of the plan of action and the recommendations of the Conference have reached the shores of the Gambia. It has been a very formidable catalyst, particularly in the promotion and recognition of the role of women in development in our country.

The Gambia Government, like all other Governments the world over, has answered the clarion call of the United Nations Copenhagen conference with an Act of Parliament. The National Women's Council Act of 1980 set up two institutions: the National Women's Council, which is the policy-making body on women, and the National Women's Bureau, which is the secretariat or the executive arm of the Council. Of course, these are in collaboration, as we are talking about women's machinery with non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society. All those are responsible for the implementation of the national policy on women which we just adopted. We have been implementing the relevant document since

the Beijing Conference in partial fulfilment of the Platform for Action, as well as its 12 critical areas of concern.

The Government's policy goals are twofold: first, to catalyse all possible courses of action necessary to eliminate all forms of discrimination and inequality between women and men, and secondly, to strengthen the creation of an enabling environment for the promotion of women's participation and equal opportunities and access to existing initiatives aimed at promoting the advancement of women and the girl child. Thus, the policy is indeed timely and relevant, particularly within the context of our country's development objective, as encapsulated in our Vision 20/20 initiative.

Since the policy is based on the concept that security and, indeed, economic empowerment for women can be achieved only through the eradication of poverty itself and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, it is therefore a critical requirement that Gambian women participate fully, without marginalization, in the socio-economic development of our country.

The draft action plan for gender policy outlines 18 policy objectives covering the 12 critical areas of concern that we agreed on in Beijing in 1995, as encapsulated in the Platform for Action, and proposes concrete strategies for the implementation of the Platform for Action.

In the area of sustainable development, the Gambia Government, in collaboration with local and international non-governmental organizations, other agencies and key players in development, has also outlined and embarked upon the implementation of a comprehensive National Poverty Alleviation Programme to ensure that the scourge of poverty is eradicated once and for all and that women, as a very important social group in that process, are empowered both economically and socially. The Programme draws its strength and direction from the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation, which was formulated in 1992 and is currently being revisited in some aspects and implemented in others. To avoid lopsided development and biases in development, emphasis is also placed on developing the rural areas of the country, in terms of physical and social infrastructure, and in building the capacity of the local populace, women and youth in particular, to take a more proactive role in national development.

Violence in any form, whether sexual harassment or physical abuse, perpetrated against women is considered the world over a violation of human rights. Gambian women, like most of their counterparts the world over, have been subjected to these kinds of abuses despite the signing of various conventions and the ratification of several others. Notably for women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was signed and ratified by the Gambia, as was the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under the laws of the Gambia, violence against women is covered legally under assault and no separate provision has been set aside for the maltreatment of women. Consequently, such cases, as in most parts of the world, are considered family matters or problems, and in most cases are forwarded to the Department of Social Welfare.

However, despite all these shortcomings that I have highlighted, law enforcement bodies, human rights organizations, other non-governmental organizations and members of civil society in the Gambia have contributed significantly to trying to end violence against women in the Gambia.

Women with disabilities form almost half of the disabled community in the Gambia, whether they are hearing, visually or mentally impaired or physically handicapped. Women with disabilities are disadvantaged because they do not enjoy full human rights and equal opportunities in family life, education, training, employment, means of income and decision-making. An important measure being put in place to alleviate these shortcomings in the Gambia is the establishment of women's wings, particularly within the structures of associations for the disabled that seek equal representation for disabled persons.

For the first time in the history of the Gambia, the 1997 Constitution of the Second Republic caters for the right to education, which is encapsulated in article 30 of the Constitution under the chapter dealing with the bill of rights. This initiative has made education, particularly at the primary level, free so as to enable girls to participate. In the same vein, the 1998-2003 National Education Policy, which aims to ensure quality, relevance and access, has been put in place. It must be emphasized that the Gambia's education policy

is consistent with the World Conference on Education for All, held in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand.

Significant progress has been registered for the girl child in the Gambia, especially in the area of education. For example, enrolment rates for girls at the primary level have surpassed the Government target of 60 per cent. We have also gone further by setting up a trust fund for girls' education in all divisions of the country. It was established and implemented under the auspices of the Department of State for Education, as well as the Forum for African Women Educationalists Gambia and other non-governmental organizations.

Our efforts in the Gambia to continue to encourage education of the girl child are geared towards training more female teachers so that they can act as role models for these girls. This has also been enhanced through another programme that we have put in place: the successful Remedial Initiative Programme for Female Teachers.

The Government has recognized the important role that women in the Gambia play in the economy, particularly in the informal and agricultural sectors.

For example, approximately 75 per cent of the agricultural labour force in the Gambia is composed of women, who, of course, form about 51 per cent of the total population of 1.3 million per our 1993 census figures. Women in the Gambia are predominately engaged in rice cultivation, horticulture and livestock production, among other areas. Since agriculture contributes about 30 per cent to 40 per cent of our gross domestic product, the role of women at the macroeconomic level is of great importance to us as a Government. Thus, present policies that we have put in place focus on empowering women in those sectors in terms of resource opportunities such as land, credit and technology.

Since Beijing, the Gambia has increased the number of female secretaries of state, or ministers as they would be called in other places, from one before Beijing to three after Beijing: the Secretary of State for Tourism and Culture, for example, is a woman, as is the Secretary of State for Education, who is present here with us today. There is also a female Vice-President, who also has responsibility for women's affairs, as well as a Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. Women are also represented in other senior management positions in the Government, as permanent secretaries, directors and heads of department, and also hold managerial positions in non-governmental organizations and in the private sector.

It is also noteworthy that the role of women in national development in the Gambia has been expanding and increasing in importance over the years since the Beijing Conference in 1995, in spite of the many obstacles that we would all agree remain in the way of true gender equality the world over. In our collective efforts to redress the imbalances, particularly in gender equality, and to plan the way forward, we in the Gambia have once again renewed our commitment and have identified seven critical areas or factors as crucial to enhancing and sustaining the role of women in development and in international peace and security for all.

The first is genuine political will at all levels for the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its 12 critical areas of concern. The second is addressing macro and sectoral policies and programmes to ensure that they are sensitive to gender and poverty oriented through mainstreaming the programmes. The third is increased advocacy, awareness creation and information, education and communication campaigns for peace and stability that encourage positive attitudes and behaviour towards gender equality, equity and the empowerment of woman. The fourth is the availability of the required resources, particularly financial and technical, to be properly targeted and utilized. The fifth is government and donor commitment and assistance in the provision of affordable, accessible and quality social and economic services in the Gambia. The sixth is the setting up of an assembly of women for the sustainable management of the environment as a means of increasing their participation. Last but not least is increased resources for strengthening women's national participation, whether in government or outside of it.

A lot has been discussed the world over about gender issues since Beijing and even before it, but few if any concrete steps have been taken by the world community in implementing policies and proclamations in that area. We appeal to the world to realize that addressing the strategic gender needs of women and girls is a must, and that ensuring equality, equity and the empowerment of women and girls is a prerequisite for the empowerment of the whole of society, as the Secretary-General himself indicated this morning. This would help achieve meaningful development and socio-economic transformation for all. For

development through women automatically trickles down to the rest of society. Indeed, development for women means development for all.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the Gambia for her statement.

Before calling on the next speaker, I would like to request representatives to be good enough to move quietly through the aisles at the end of each speech and as they exit and enter the General Assembly Hall. I would like particularly to appeal to all delegations to maintain optimal silence in the Assembly Hall so that we may accord deserved dignity to the speakers, and also so that we may be able to listen to them. I ask representatives to cooperate with the President to ensure that order and silence are maintained in the Assembly Hall.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Didjob Divungi Di Ndinge, Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic.

Mr. Divungi Di Ndinge (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): This is the first opportunity that Member States have had at this high level of representation to assess the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Clearly this is a real opportunity and an important step in the just struggle for the liberation of women and the improvement of their status.

The theme of the special session is highly symbolic, and sends a powerful signal to all world leaders and citizens. The evaluation that we are here to carry out is most timely, because it will enable us to understand how far we have come and to look into the future. I am convinced that it will enable us to further mobilize the international community's determination to work with us in our national and regional experiences.

Before offering a brief outline of what my own country, Gabon, has done, I wish first warmly and fraternally to congratulate you, Mr. President, on behalf of the President of the Gabonese Republic, His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, whom I have the honour to represent at this session. Your sterling qualities as a diplomat and your spirit of conciliation will be a guarantee of success in our work.

Looking back over history, one gets the feeling, borne out, indeed, by facts, that every change in the well-being and social status of women has depended on the image and the role of women as defined by men.

Whether we are from the North or the South, whether we belong to the earliest civilizations or to those that are called modern, we must make ourselves understand that we cannot effectively promote development and peace, social progress and the evolution of ideas, or make use of the intellectual capacity in our countries or in different regions of the world, if women, who today represent more than half of humankind, do not take their proper place in the development of the world.

Women remain a basic point of reference, playing, directly or indirectly, a major role in society — a role that must be organized and promoted.

With this vision in mind, Gabon has, for several decades — at least at the conceptual level — been integrating women into society in the context of national consolidation, country development and respect for fundamental human liberties and rights. Hence, our Constitution explicitly promotes the equality of citizens before the law without distinction on the basis of origin, race, sex, opinion or religion.

Very early on, legislative provisions were adopted in favour of women, including the elimination of the dowry, the prohibition of marriage by minors and the right to education and work.

At the institutional level, and as a means of showing our desire to integrate women into the process of national construction, towards the end of the 1960s the head of State set up a specific ministry with the basic task of promoting the rights of women. Furthermore, for many years now, women have been occupying important State positions.

At the international level, Gabon is a party to the 1984 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In order to transform the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action into short-, medium- and long-term strategies within the framework of a national programme, from 8 to 10 March 1996, Gabon held a follow-up seminar to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

On that occasion, it was generally agreed that, 10 years after the Nairobi Conference, in many countries equality between women and men had not been

achieved, despite ambitious institutional and legal undertakings. This passive resistance was based essentially on cultural and social prejudice; lack of confidence on the part of women themselves; lack of training or a low level of study on the part of young girls of school age; and an unfavourable economic and social context, which worsened existing problems.

The national plan of action that resulted from that seminar was aimed essentially at the mobilization, independence and social and economic promotion of women. The programme has been adopted by the Government. Here, we would like to pay tribute to the United Nations for the help that it provided. Through the United Nations Development Programme, it has been the principal provider of technical and financial support for the development of the programme, as well as for its implementation and follow-up.

With regard to the concrete achievements under this plan, I am pleased to be able to mention the creation of a monitoring centre for women's rights and gender equality. Functioning as both a study centre and a means of applying pressure to review legislation, the monitoring centre is a place where dialogue can take place between the Government, Parliament and civil society, which manages it by means of a non-governmental organization. The monitoring centre is intended to enable women to obtain and consolidate all their fundamental rights by sensitizing and informing them. In this context, as from this year, all the provincial branches of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women will be connected to the Internet.

I should also like to tell the Assembly that we are placing great hope in our education and training programme for women. Indeed, encouraging young girls to gain professional qualifications and promoting the functional literacy of girls and women, as well as a joint programme between Gabon and the United Nations Children's Fund dealing with the phenomenon of the failure to educate young girls, are promising activities. They undoubtedly provide women of every age with better conditions to enter the workforce by means of independent employment or micro-enterprises.

It is in this spirit that the Government would like to establish a support fund for the financing of productive projects to enable the setting up of more than 1,000 joint and individual projects.

Also in this context, we should like to refer to the President's Grand Prize national competition for the promotion of social and economic activities for women, organized every year since 1998. This initiative shows the degree of importance attributed by the head of State of Gabon to the emancipation of women and, in particular, to their involvement in the development of our country.

Gabon has also organized seminars, in particular a workshop on the concept of gender that took place from 18 to 22 October 1999, which published a national report on women and decision-making and is in the process of producing a video on violence against women.

Throughout the world, and particularly in Africa, many different forms of tension persist. Civil wars and armed conflicts of the deadliest and most shameful kind are breaking out or starting up again, affecting groups or entire peoples, who wander endlessly within their own countries or beyond their borders in search of an oasis of peace.

In introducing the concept of peace into the theme of this session, we must all understand that peace and stability are preconditions for ensuring the success of any possible programmes of action. Women — the matrix, the base, the keystone of society — must, more than ever, embody the hope and future of humankind, and its opportunity for redemption in its constant search for peace.

Women — who, together with children, are the main victims of conflict situations — must not suffer yet more. They must react, and they must act. It is with that firm conviction that the women of my country have, for several years, been contributing to the search for peace in Gabon and beyond our borders.

I should like to refer in particular to the declaration issued in Libreville by the women of Gabon in favour of peace in Congo Brazzaville in 1997, at the height of the civil war, on the occasion of the meeting of heads of State that was held with a view to achieving reconciliation between the parties to the conflict.

I should also like to mention the establishment in December 1999 and the launching of the activities of the national committee of women for peace and development, the first national branch of the African Women's Committee for Peace and Development,

which is a consultative body of the Organization of African Unity that was created in November 1998.

Finally, I should like to refer to the appeal for peace in the Central African subregion made by the Committee to heads of State, to the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity and to the Directors-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and of the International Labour Organization.

Of course, the concrete results of the national programme have not yet met our goals. The process has begun, but we believe that much remains to be done. The promotion of women requires a greater effort on the part of our Government, as well as more sustained support of different kinds from the international community. We are therefore eager to listen to the experience of others in the context of this follow-up session, which, enriched by the important events that are taking place in parallel with our work, should lead us to the necessary acceleration of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

We must consolidate our commitment to shake up old ideas and to ensure that all of our fellow citizens, both female and male, are able to play an essential role in building prosperous nations and realizing the dream of a great global village in which the ideas of peace, equality and justice triumph.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of Gabon for his statement.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Hage Geingob, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia.

Mr. Geingob (Namibia): Let me begin by congratulating my compatriot and friend Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on assuming the presidency of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and on presiding at this historic special session on the theme of gender equality, development and peace. Knowing his tested negotiating and diplomatic skills, we are assured that this special session will be crowned with resounding success.

In the same vein, let me register my appreciation to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the able manner in which he has been guiding the affairs of our family of nations since his assumption of his high office.

I take pride not only as Prime Minister but also as a man in leading Namibia's delegation to this historic conference. I am leading this delegation in tandem with the draft Political Declaration submitted by the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, which, in particular, appeals to men to "involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality". (A/S/23-2, p. 9, para. 6) However, I hope that the future delegations that come to this type of conference will not be led by me or by any other men, but by a woman Prime Minister of Namibia.

The stated purpose of this special session is to reaffirm our commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The underlying and more important purpose is to review and appraise progress and identify new challenges and trends to ensure that commitments to gender equality, development and peace are fully realized. To achieve meaningful and effective implementation of the Platform for Action, Namibia adopted the National Gender Policy in 1999. The Policy addresses the critical issues expressed in the Beijing Platform for Action and is aimed at facilitating, and eventually achieving, gender equality.

In the area of poverty eradication, we believe that effective eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone, but that it will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures of our societies. To achieve this, a community-based rehabilitation strategy has been adopted to address the imbalances between urban and rural women.

We believe that education is an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Namibia has made significant progress in the education of women and girls. Special efforts are being made to curb school dropout rates among girls. However, these efforts are being frustrated by factors such as teenage pregnancy, curriculum bias and social deficits inherited from the old system. Our commitment to the education of women is aptly reflected in the saying that goes "Educate women and you educate the whole nation". That should be our slogan as we enter the twenty-first century.

We have instituted health programmes to cover all aspects of women's lives. New health facilities are being provided and attention is being given to the high mortality rates among women and girls as a result of

malaria, tuberculosis, water-borne diseases and malnutrition.

Despite the positive results gained through the primary health-care strategy, the scourge of HIV/AIDS has exacted a significant toll on the national health system. It is in the light of this escalating scourge that Kora, along with South African brothers and sisters, has decided to stage the "One Billion Against Aids in Africa" concert in South Africa during November this year. The objective of the concert is to create national and international awareness of the fact that 2 million Africans died of HIV/AIDS-related causes during 1999 and that the staggering number of 23 million Africans are living with HIV/AIDS.

As if the calamity caused by HIV/AIDS were not enough of a burden on our women, violence against women adds to the violation of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms. For example, we have passed a bill to fight the crime of rape. The Combating of Rape bill is gender-neutral and will give women greater control over their lives and greater protection against rape and other acts of violence. In addition, our courts have begun imposing heavier sentences for perpetrators of the horrendous act of rape.

To prepare an environment in which to realize women's de jure and de facto enjoyment of human rights, Namibia has proudly ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We have done so with pride, because we believe that concerted efforts are necessary if we are to succeed in reducing the disparities that have negatively impinged on women, the girl child, children, and persons with disabilities.

Participants at a recent seminar in Namibia adopted the Windhoek Declaration and Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective and Multidimensional Peace Support Operations. The seminar was organized by the Lessons Learned Unit of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and hosted by the Government of Namibia. The Windhoek Declaration calls for increased public awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming in peace support operations. We therefore strongly urge the special session to take account of the Windhoek Declaration.

A number of policy and legislative measures have been initiated in order to promote women's role in the economy, including equal access to economic resources. For instance, our efforts to further level the economic playing field include the passage of the Close Corporations Act, which allows women entrepreneurs operating in the small and micro-enterprise sectors to take advantage of the legal status afforded by the Act. At the same time, procedures for the award of Government tenders have been rationalized so as to encourage bids from women entrepreneurs.

Even though women constitute the larger part of the Namibian population, fewer women than men have been elected to positions of decision-making. Efforts are, however, continuing to transform the political landscape by increasing women's representation. On the other hand, women are fairly represented in several constitutional positions, corporate boards and commissions. I must hasten to add, however, that this is just a drop in the ocean and falls short of the levels of participation required if women are to be meaningful actors in our society.

As a part of efforts at mainstreaming gender in Namibia's national budget, the Government has committed itself to give high priority to gender equality in its overall economic and social policies. The Government will also increase its budgetary allocation to cater for gender-specific programmes and activities. The elevation of the former Department of Women Affairs to a fully fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare is a further demonstration of Namibia's commitment to gender equality.

Our Constitution enjoins us to protect our fragile ecosystem and to promote biodiversity.

As we enter the information age, along with the proliferation of information technology, the role of women in media becomes increasingly important. However, despite the concerted efforts of the Namibian media's women's association to draw attention to the achievements of women in the media, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions to influence media policies. The Government will continue to encourage public media to enable women journalists to take editorial charge of media operations.

Although Namibia is not directly affected by the consequences of armed conflict on women, we are mindful of the plight of women in regions of the world where the impact of armed conflict has caused havoc and brought misery into the lives of millions of

innocent women. We will continue to build bridges between parties to conflict in order to rid the world in general, and Africa in particular, of these senseless wars.

In looking ahead, the Namibian Government, in partnership with the Namibian people, will continue to focus on redressing prevailing imbalances in order to determine appropriate and lasting solutions. We must forge a new social compact to meet the challenges before us. As we enter the twenty-first century, we need a new set of solutions and a paradigm shift in addressing the critical issues presented in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In order to improve the status of women and promote gender equality, we commit ourselves to ensuring equal constitutional protection of fundamental human rights for both women and men and to implementing affirmative action to provide equal opportunities for women and men. We also commit ourselves to strengthening the national machinery to promote, monitor and report on progress made as regards gender mainstreaming and to continuing to provide political support and commitment to gender equality. As a leader of government administration and head of the civil service, I will encourage the implementation of national gender policy and other policies within both the public and private sectors.

In conclusion, let us ensure not only that the spirit of the Beijing Platform for Action remains a road map, but that we, the peoples of the United Nations, are willing to travel that road together. Let us reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and, indeed, in equal rights for men and women. More power to women — our victory is certain.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Wu Yi, State Councillor of China.

Mrs. Wu Yi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Today, the United Nations is convening a special session on women, which is undoubtedly of great significance to the development of the cause of women and for the prosperity and progress of all humanity. I am confident that under your guidance, Sir, the current session will be crowned by complete success.

Five years ago, we successfully hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. That Conference not only fully demonstrated the determination and confidence of the international community in resolving women's issues, but also defined more clearly the objectives of the progressive cause of women worldwide and the concrete measures that should be adopted to achieve them, thereby injecting new vitality into the further development of the global cause of women.

In the five years that have elapsed, the world situation has continued to move towards multipolarity, while the call of peoples of various countries for peace, stability and development has grown ever louder. Science and technology are advancing with each passing day, productive forces have developed to an unprecedented high level and the search for social progress and the development of civilization have become irresistible historical trends. In these circumstances, improving the status of women, safeguarding their rights and interests, tapping their potential and ensuring gender equality have become the broad common goal of the international community, which has made tireless efforts to implement the follow-up actions of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Women have an important role to play in creating human civilization and promoting social development. Women are a great force for human progress and world peace. Without the participation of women, there can be no development or lasting peace. It is precisely because of this that the cause of women should be incorporated into the overall strategy for peace and development. To resolve the relevant issues effectively and definitively, it is essential that we give comprehensive consideration to these issues. The Chinese Government hereby takes this opportunity to appeal to the international community to do the following.

First, we must create a peaceful environment for the progressive advancement of women's causes. Women are probably the principal victims of war and armed conflict. Only when war and armed conflict are rooted out once and for all can women's causes move forward. To that end, all countries must strictly abide by the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the basic principles of international law, work to resolve international disputes by peaceful means and firmly uphold the core role of the United Nations in international peace and security.

Secondly, we must make earnest efforts to eliminate women's poverty. Effective measures should be taken to help women in poverty out of their difficulties and to provide a reliable material basis for the development and progress of women. Developed countries and the relevant international institutions should faithfully fulfil their obligations in this regard.

Thirdly, we must ensure women's full participation in the process of economic globalization. Serious efforts should be made to study the negative impact of economic globalization on women's development and effective measures taken to prevent women, particularly those in developing countries, from being marginalized in the process of economic globalization.

Fourthly, we must actively bring into play the role of the United Nations system. The United Nations should play a more effective guiding and coordinating role in international cooperation, with women's participation in development. Since countries and regions differ from one another, the United Nations should encourage regional efforts to establish and strengthen coordinating mechanisms in relation to women's issues so as to enhance regional cooperation and promote progress in women's causes in various regions.

The Chinese Government has always attached importance to gender equality. Following our successful hosting of the Fourth World Conference on Women, we have been making vigorous efforts and achieved considerable progress in raising the status of women and promoting their comprehensive development in China. In implementation of the follow-up actions of the Conference, the Chinese Government has formulated and promulgated the Programme for the Development of Chinese Women 1995-2000. As a national programme for implementing the Platform for Action, the Programme includes such specific measures as formulating and improving laws and regulations on the protection of women and children; enhancing national mechanisms to promote the higher status of women; providing stronger leadership for women's work; organizing education and training to better prepare women to participate in state affairs and the policy-making process; and setting up a sound monitoring and assessment system for a periodical review and evaluation of the development of women's causes in China so as to provide a policy-making basis for the central Government.

In China, thanks to five years of efforts, the level of women's participation in the policy-making process has improved in terms of both breath and depth. The percentage of women deputies to the National People's Congress and of women members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference has increased. Job opportunities for women and the number of employed women have increased steadily. In recent years, the number of employed women has reached 340 million, or 46.7 per cent. Women's educational level has also risen, with a drastic decline in illiteracy. We have, by and large, realized the objective of basic health care, and all of our women are now enjoying better health. Maternal health-care coverage now reaches 85 per cent of women.

I should like to point out also that the governments of the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions have also attached great importance to the advancement of women since their successful return to China. They have taken forceful measures to implement the follow-up actions of the Fourth World Conference on Women, and they have achieved considerable progress in improving women's status, safeguarding women's rights and interests, and promoting the comprehensive development of the cause of women.

The advent of the new century has filled us with hope. We believe that progress in the area of gender equality will be unstoppable and that further strides will be made in the advancement of women. We are confident that, with the joint efforts of people of all countries, the twenty-first century will truly become one of gender equality, development and peace. The Chinese Government is ready to work tirelessly, together with other countries, for the early realization of this lofty goal in accordance with the purposes and spirit of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Dilbar Gulyamova, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mrs. Gulyamova (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Committee of the Women of the Republic, allow me to welcome all participants to this meeting of the special session of the General Assembly, dedicated to the review and appraisal of the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted five years ago.

The Government of Uzbekistan, over the last five years, has developed and carried out strategic activities of its own at the national level, with a view to implementing the basic provisions of the Platform for Action.

One of the main achievements with respect to the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women has been the development of a national mechanism for the protection of women's rights and the implementation of programmes aimed at enhancing the status of women. One of the components of this programme has been the establishment of the new post of deputy Prime Minister for the social protection of the family, maternity and children. Corresponding posts have been established at the deputy head of administration level in all the regional and territorial structures of the executive branch of the Republic. Thus, national mechanisms to promote the development of women and their potential have been set up in Uzbekistan.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, women have equal rights with men. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mr. Islam Karimov, and the Government have undertaken all necessary measures for the realization of women's rights in the political arena and increased the role of women in political and economic decision-making at the highest level.

An economic policy that promotes the employment and increases the income of working women has been developed in the Republic.

The most important measure that the State has taken to improve the status of women is to increase their access to employment. Indeed, every year between 280,000 and 300,000 jobs are created in the Republic, of which 40 per cent are held by women.

The dynamic structural changes that have taken place in the country have enabled the rapid development of the social and industrial infrastructure, especially in rural areas and in small towns. As a result of this policy, today women constitute more than 45 per cent of the country's active labour resources.

Women work in all principal branches of the industrial sector, including light industry, agriculture, transportation, construction and communications, as well as in the areas of public education, public health services and culture.

Female entrepreneurship, directed at the development of the industrial sector in particular and at the production of consumer goods based on the use of the Republic's natural resources, has increased over the last few years. Favourable conditions for obtaining an education and for increasing the qualifications of women have been created. In Uzbekistan, one out of two specialists with higher or secondary education is a woman.

Independent Uzbekistan has become a full subject of international law and has acceded to many conventions and other international instruments. Uzbekistan was one of the first States in Central Asia to accede to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, reaffirming the rights of women at the international level and determining States' plans of action regarding their protection.

As the result of the last parliamentary elections, which were held on a multiparty basis in 1999, 18 women were elected as deputies of the Oliy Majlis, or Parliament, of the Republic. The following posts are held by women: deputy chairman of the Oliy Majlis, chairman of the Oliy Majlis Committee on social issues, ombudsman, and chairman of the Oliy Majlis Commission on family and women's issues.

Because the institution of the family is the basis of society and within it the well-being of women must be ensured, the issues of the economic, social and spiritual protection of the family and of maternal and children's health have been incorporated into national policy. The President of the Republic is the driving force behind the struggle for the health of the family.

Our head of State declared 1997 to be the Year of Human Concerns, 1998 the Year of the Family and 1999 the Year of Women. Special programmes were developed and implemented at the national level during those years. In 1999, State programmes were implemented that aim to strengthen the role of women in the family, in the State and in the public arena, and to enhance the system of protection of their legal, social and spiritual interests. The State provided additional financial support for the specific measures that have been implemented this year.

A unique system for the social protection of families with children has been set up in our Republic. It takes into consideration their economic situation and the financial capabilities of the State, and it involves

gradual measures and sets priorities in pursuing a strongly targeted social policy.

Social assistance for the Republic's population is currently provided mainly in the framework of two major programmes: one for families with children and one for poor families. The decision to strengthen the effectiveness of social assistance and decrease administrative expenses is unique in world practice. Support is financed from the budget and is distributed by local self-managing bodies, called *mahallyas*.

The declaration of the year 2000 as the Year of a Healthy Population is a vivid example of the tireless efforts of the President and the Government of the Republic. Significant additional allocations are being made for implementation of the State programme adopted at the governmental level. The health of mothers and children is a major indicator of the level of social and economic well-being of the country. Preservation of the genetic pool depends primarily on the mother's health. Protecting the health of mothers and children is among the primary activities of our country, and specialized medical facility networks have been developed at various levels to ensure maternity and childhood protection.

The most important stage of development of the women's movement in Uzbekistan was the establishment of non-governmental organizations for women. They have become a noticeable force and have shown that interactivity between the Government and the non-governmental sector has increased the efficiency of determining and resolving various issues relating to women's problems. Non-governmental organizations for women recently received recognition due to their real and potential contribution to the resolution of women's problems by initiating significant public measures and carrying out gender research and effective cooperation with foreign organizations.

The resolution of women's issues and the democratization of society are closely interconnected processes. New forms of expression and the realization of women's interests are first steps towards transforming them from an object of social protection to an active person. For that reason, elevating the status of women in society is one of the basic tasks and priorities of our State, and therefore each ministry, executive body and authority has elaborated and is carrying out long-term programmes aimed at further developing the status of women, for which the State contributes many material and financial resources.

Uzbekistan, along with many other countries, will continue its work aimed at fulfilling each of the 12 critical areas outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. It would be interesting to know of other countries' governmental activities in this area. In this regard, I wish to reaffirm the need for an exchange of information so that all countries can benefit from prior experience.

Finally, I wish each participant in the special session of the General Assembly health, happiness and well-being.

The President: I call on Her Excellency Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Minister of the Department of Public Service and Administration of South Africa.

Ms. Fraser-Moleketi (South Africa): Let me thank the United Nations for giving us an opportunity to collectively reflect on the gains we have made as women since Beijing, as well as reflecting on the challenges that we still face. I would like to agree with the Secretary-General that, indeed, the future of the planet depends on women.

It has been a long march from Beijing to New York. However, what has this long march meant for the women of the world? What has the impact been for gender programmes? Or has there been any impact?

As we stand at the threshold of a new century, we are confronted with a world which in many ways still faces the same challenges that we faced at the beginning of the dying century. In many other ways, however, we have made unbelievable strides.

Some of the old problems include what the American writer Du Bois called the problem of the colour line. We have noted with concern the resurgence of racism in most parts of the developed world. As a result of this, the South African Government has agreed to host the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001. This is because we have had the experience and understanding that racism and gender discrimination are directly interlinked.

Some new challenges have been thrown up by the globalization process. This process has resulted in both opportunity and despair. The gap between rich and poor has widened. I dare to say that poverty, including

its female and racial dimensions, remains one of our biggest challenges. This challenge transcends Member-country boundaries and requires a collective effort at the global level, particularly in the face of globalization and its unintended social destabilizing consequences. While globalization has many advantages for all of us, it is increasingly associated with the rise of inequality in the world. However, globalization is a reality. The challenge for us, as an international community, is to come up with strategies that will minimize the destabilizing consequences, particularly in the developing countries in the South, and ensure that the benefits of globalization are shared by all.

In view of these challenges, we recommend that developing countries, especially women in these countries, must participate in the rule-making process and the restructuring of international governance, institutions, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Levels of poverty throughout the world are unacceptable, with half of the world's population living on less than $2 per day. The Commonwealth Heads of Government, meeting in South Africa in 1999, stated that poverty makes global peace and security fragile. They accepted that poverty constitutes a deep and fundamental structural flaw in the world economy.

In all of this, women in our societies form the bulk of the marginalized. Poverty does indeed have a feminine face. Illiteracy has a feminine face. Economic disempowerment has a feminine face. More than half of the world's households are headed by women.

The threat to the security of nations is still real. While there have been major advances in creating a secure environment for all nations, including through the non-proliferation process, there are some worrying trends regarding the process to be followed to achieve this.

So in the face of these challenges, how do we as the women of the world, and all those who are committed to the gender project, respond? In the face of more households being headed by women, as I stated earlier, do we respond by stating that a family is made up of father, mother and children? Should we close our eyes to the reality facing us and resort to a world view which provides us with comfort zones? This is but one issue we need to resolve as women of the world.

Do we believe that the elimination of poverty is achievable? Are we committed to removing the persistent inequalities facing women globally, nationally and locally, within both the public and the private arena?

Can we honestly evaluate progress on the commitments we made in the Beijing Platform for Action, or are we expecting the women of the world to wait while we debate language on these issues?

What is the bare minimum that Beijing + 5 should facilitate for women in the developed and the developing world? Some of the answers raise difficult issues.

We must ensure that we close the increasing and persistent divide between rich and poor. We must eradicate poverty and its feminization. We must capitalize on the benefits of globalization and obviate its disadvantages, especially for the developing world, so that women and children of the South can share its benefits on an equal footing with those in developed countries. Hence, we must take urgent measures to address the needs of large majorities, in particular women and children who live in extreme poverty. This calls for greater access by women to the economy, globally and nationally and at all levels within countries. There is a need as well for us to ensure the centrality of the role of women in conflict-prevention and peace. Women should not be seen as victims on the march away from conflict situations; women must be those who are involved in conflict resolution. They must be the survivors, and we should contribute to ensuring that that process takes place.

Should the debate on sexual and reproductive rights not be approached from the point of view of choice? One should look to protecting rights and providing services to all women and children. This requires us to have the courage to move beyond the narrow interpretation of sexual and reproductive rights and beyond the narrow interpretation of the family.

How do we deal with the human rights of women as we look towards the empowerment of women in addition to our continued focus on gender equality? There are a number of bare minimum aspects, but they should be identified within the focus of equality, development and peace. We need to ensure that we

have measurable programmes with clearly defined performance indicators that guide outcomes directly related to women's realities.

In my country we have attempted to confront these challenges in the best possible way within the confines of our limited resources. Our transition to democracy presented us with an opportunity to integrate gender in a holistic reconstruction and development programme aimed at transforming our society. Allow me to mention some of our key achievements.

As a Government, we had to move swiftly to put systems and programmes in place. The gender machinery located in the executive branch, parliament and civil society was established in 1997. We established key institutions. In parliament, *inter alia*, we put in place a joint monitoring committee on the improvement of the quality of life and status of women. Today we have an enabling legal framework for the promotion of gender equality. The key national instrument is our Constitution, which guarantees equal rights between men and women and also provides positive measures to eliminate discrimination and promote substantive equality.

We have made a number of other achievements as well, humble though they may be. Let me add one more: at present, South Africa ranks high among countries with the largest complement of women parliamentarians, with 30 per cent of members of parliament women. We have a fair number in the executive, as well as women presiding officers of parliament. Looking at the judiciary, a significant number of women have been appointed as judges.

But it is not just the number of women appointed nationally and internationally that will make the difference. It will, once again, require courage from all participants in this session to ensure that we move forward in meeting our Beijing. We must have the courage to implement what we earlier committed ourselves to, and not to move backward, but forward, if we want to ensure the future of the planet, which does indeed depend on women.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Adriana Delpiano, Minister for Women's Affairs of Chile.

Mrs. Delpiano (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I begin my statement, Mr. President, by conveying the greetings of the President of the Republic of Chile, Mr. Ricardo Lagos, and of the delegation which accompanies me, and by expressing our pleasure at participating in this special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". This important session on women, the first of the twenty-first century, is taking place as the world embarks upon a new era. This session marks an advance and a new commitment in respect for human rights and in the unending quest for new relations between men and women based on more cooperation, dialogue, understanding and greater respect and equal opportunities.

The Chilean delegation that accompanies me here is composed of individuals with diverse perspectives and experiences on women's issues. Among them are parliamentarians from different political parties, government officials, trade unionists and professionals from non-governmental organizations. All of them represent a staunch commitment to progress in achieving equal opportunities for women and men in Chile and in a worldwide society that is increasing globalized and interdependent.

Over the past five years, Chile has made significant progress in commitments undertaken under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which my country ratified in 1989, in implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and, especially, under the Beijing Platform for Action. At the regional level, Chile participated in agreements adopted at the seventh and eighth sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. At both sessions we shared our experiences, measured our progress, developed proposals and identified common challenges, as reflected in the consensus agreements of Santiago and of Lima.

To implement these commitments at the national level, Chile developed a valuable tool: its equal opportunities plan for women 1994-1999, which served as a guide to public policies during that period. That document was evaluated in a participatory process involving women from all parts of Chile. This resulted in the elaboration of a second plan for equality to guide our actions over the first decade of the current century.

Between the Beijing conference and the present session, Chile has made great efforts in the legal

sphere. These include the enactment, in March 1999, of a historic reform that explicitly incorporates into our national constitution equality before the law for women and men. In 1998, a new law of filiation was enacted that eliminates legal distinctions between children born within marriage and those born out of wedlock.

In the area of labour law, important reforms have been enacted to guarantee the rights of women workers and to seek compatibility of their employment with family life. These include maternity leave for household workers and leave of absence for mothers of infants up to age one who are ill. In this respect, Chile strongly supports the legal measures and standards aimed at protecting women during maternity which are now under discussion at Geneva in the International Labour Organization.

With regard to education, Chile has a 95 per cent literacy rate, and equal participation by girls in the school system. The Government is undertaking a major reform of the educational system, with the aim of improving the quality of education and increasing the length of schooling from 9.3 to 12 years. In this context, the challenge for the country in terms of women's equality is to move towards the elimination of the cultural inequalities that recur in the educational system, to promote women's access to research and education in science and technology and to significantly increase the availability of pre-school education in order to facilitate mothers' access to the labour market.

As regards violence against women, Chile has enacted a law that seeks to protect the victim and punish the aggressor, but experience of its enforcement over the years has shown that the law must be improved. The number of complaints of violence against women has increased in recent years as a result of greater national awareness of the problem. We now have the task of creating mechanisms to ensure that the law is enforced and to set up family tribunals.

With regard to health, while statistics show that there is broad professional health-care coverage — 99.9 per cent — for women during childbirth and very low maternal and infant mortality rates, Chile is considering a far-reaching reform of the health-care system in which women's health will be a fundamental concern. It will be necessary to reform certain private sector mechanisms that make the cost of health coverage very expensive for women of child-bearing age. In addition, abortion continues to be a major public health problem. In this regard, I should like, here in this Hall, to reaffirm Chile's commitment to life and its opposition to abortion. In this context, the Government of President Lagos is promoting a policy of responsible maternity and paternity, which allows parents freely to make their own decisions about conception and birth. We are designing intersectoral policies to prevent abortion and unwanted pregnancies, which, if they are to succeed, will require the participation of all sectors of the country.

As for women's participation in decision-making positions, I would like to emphasize here that, for the first time in my country, the President of the Republic has appointed five women to his ministerial Cabinet, in such important areas as foreign affairs, planning, health, education and women's issues. Furthermore, he has appointed many women vice-ministers and regional governors, thereby increasing their representation which stood at 4 per cent at the time of Chile's return to democratic rule and is 30 per cent today. However, we note with concern that women's participation is still scarce at the intermediate levels of State and muncipal government and in Parliament and private enterprise.

As for international relations, Chile has maintained a presence, through both the Foreign Ministry and the National Service for Women, in all international forums discussing the issues with which we are concerned here at this special session of the General Assembly. We are convinced that international cooperation must play a fundamental role in women's full development. We should like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the constant support that Chile has received from the various United Nations agencies.

The Government of President Ricardo Lagos is committed to providing a powerful impetus to the achievement of full citizenship rights for women by making significant progress in five areas of action. The subject of women and work will be one of the current Government's main areas for action. The other issues relate to women's rights, civil participation, the quality of life and women's cultural development.

The purpose of this ambitious programme is to incorporate into our country's development the enormous potential of women's hard work, creativity, energies and talents. While the Government acknowledges the social and historical debt that the

country owes its women, it wants to approach this issue on the basis of the opportunity to include them fully in the construction of the new Chile of the twenty-first century.

In this context, one of the objectives is the incorporation of a gender perspective into the budgets of the different State agencies. This is a great challenge that implies a fundamental change in the way public policies are conceived, with the aim of achieving greater equality between men and women in Chilean society.

Finally, I should like to reaffirm the determination of the State of Chile to work to build a country in which there will be equality before the law and in daily life, a Chile integrated into the regional and international community, capable of building a new, peaceful form of coexistence, respectful of differences and valuing all contributions in this globalized world.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to draw the attention of members to the matter of the length of the statements made in plenary meeting. Members are aware that we have a very long list of speakers for each meeting. In order to accommodate every speaker inscribed on the list and to adjourn our meetings at a reasonable time, I strongly appeal to all speakers to make an extra effort to observe the seven-minute limit. I look forward to the cooperation of members.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Maria de Belém Roseira, Minister for Equality of Portugal.

Mrs. Roseira (Portugal): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries, Cyprus and Turkey, align themselves with this statement.

It is a great honour for us to take the floor, on behalf of the European Union, at this special session on a topic that is important not only to women, but to the whole of humankind, women and men alike. During the lengthy preparatory process leading to the special session, a significant effort was made to review and assess the progress made in implementing the Platform for Action and in identifying further initiatives. Much has been accomplished, but much remains to be achieved. The Beijing Platform for Action is an ambitious plan of action, and we must commit ourselves to its full and accelerated implementation. This is a requirement for justice, for democracy and for the full realization of human rights.

The promotion, protection and full enjoyment of all human rights is central to the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action and to the outcome document of this special session. It is also a prerequisite for gender equality and for the advancement of women and a common basis for addressing the 12 critical areas of concern considered in Beijing. We underline the significance for women of the international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The European Union welcomes the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the General Assembly, allowing for a right to petition and an inquiry procedure under the Convention.

As we review the Platform for Action, we would like to emphasize that when we speak of the feminization of poverty, it is a human rights issue we are speaking of — a civil and political rights issue, as well as an economic, social and cultural rights issue. When we speak of violence against women — physical, psychological or sexual, at home or on the street, it is human rights we are speaking of. When we speak of the exclusion of women from political power or from peace processes, it is a human rights issue we are speaking of. States must shoulder their obligation to end violations of women's human rights and to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

States have an obligation to fully respect the principles of good governance and to take legal, administrative and other measures to protect and promote the human rights of all — women and men. Unless and until States accept and act on this obligation, we will not be able to make progress. Full implementation of the Platform for Action therefore requires the political will to carry forward this comprehensive vision of human rights as the basis for all actions.

In such a rights-based approach, it is particularly important to respect the full diversity of women at all stages of the life cycle — childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age — and to prevent discrimination on the basis of race, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic class or status as indigenous people, migrants, displaced persons or refugees. Laws, practices and procedures should be developed, reviewed and implemented to prohibit and eliminate all forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia, on such grounds as the European Union established in the Amsterdam Treaty.

We are living in a rapidly changing world. Globalization, as we all know, is a key factor in this rapid process of change. It is profoundly affecting women's and men's lives. As a result of the still prevailing systemic discrimination against them, women have often been particularly affected. It is our common responsibility to minimize possible negative effects and to empower women in their efforts to participate in the globalization process and to grasp and develop the potential gains it offers for sustainable development. In this process there are also other positive changes, in particular in relation to women's and men's roles.

A greater sharing of the public and private spheres of life is now an increasing reality, as are greater solidarity and understanding of the real values of the roles and responsibilities which society has assigned to women and men in the course of history. Equality in rights and the sharing of tasks and responsibilities in all areas of life — including in the area of political power at the national and local levels and decision-making — are areas we must concentrate on in the twenty-first century. In this context, the Platform for Action remains the fundamental instrument that leads the way. The further actions and initiatives adopted at this special session will give us new signposts for our way forward.

It is important to fight against specific forms of discrimination, whether in employment and economic life or in the form of violence, trafficking or any other form. It is important to fight against any violation of the human rights of women, including their sexual and reproductive rights. It is important to fight for equality in specific areas such as equal participation in political life and in decision-making, or in any other area of life in society. But it is also essential that an integrated approach be adopted so that the whole environment we are living in can be conducive to gender equality and to the full enjoyment of human rights by all.

Such an approach has consequences and effects on policies, not only in theory but also in practice. This is the reason why one of our priorities is to put rights into practice. We have said it before; we are reaffirming it now. This also requires that a dual approach that includes specific actions and a strategy of gender mainstreaming into all policies and programmes be adopted and effectively implemented, and that effective mechanisms for the achievement of the goals, including budgetary provisions, be fully developed and utilized.

Setting clear goals and targets and getting better measures of progress towards achieving them are invaluable tools in helping speed up the process of change. Instruments for gender-impact assessment, statistics disaggregated by sex and age, common quantitative and qualitative indicators, data to measure progress and the development and use of these and other tools, are priorities for the future. We as Governments are primarily responsible for the advancement of this process and will be held accountable for the progress towards gender equality.

It is also imperative to involve all actors of society in the implementation of the Platform for Action: men and women in general, Governments, parliaments, institutions and civil society — including the private sector, social partners, non-governmental organizations and international, regional, national and local institutions. We must all work together in a global partnership, bringing our skills and resources together to achieve our common purpose.

To conclude, we would say that, particularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century, we have advanced on the road to equality. We must further pursue this road and be faithful to the inspiration of Beijing. On the occasion of this special session it is therefore our duty to fully commit ourselves to the task of fully achieving the objective of building gender equality. It is not just a matter of fairness and justice to women — that it certainly is — but above all it is a matter of democracy and of human rights for all, women and men. To this cause we fully recommit ourselves.

The President: I now give the floor to her Excellency The Honourable Mary Nagu, Minister for

Community Development, Women's Affairs and Children of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Ms. Nagu (United Republic of Tanzania): Allow me to express the delight of my delegation at seeing you, Mr. President, presiding over the deliberations of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". You can count on my delegation's support.

The Government of Tanzania would further like to register its most profound appreciation for having the honour of chairing the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee. The Bureau had the task of articulating the direction and vision of the Preparatory Committee. We salute its efforts.

Five years after the Beijing Conference is indeed a short time within which to implement fully programmes dealing with issues of such monumental size as those on the women's agenda. It is however, enough time to demonstrate in concrete terms the will to implement the commitments. This special session affords us the opportunity to re-examine our commitment against the background of our constantly changing circumstances. It also offers us the opportunity to open up doors for a cross-fertilization of ideas, experiences and aspirations in our collective efforts to better the lives of women.

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania made a commitment at the Fourth World Conference on Women to fully implement the 12 critical areas of concern for the advancement of women. Let me take this opportunity to reaffirm Tanzania's commitment to that effect. The commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women in Tanzania is intact. My Government acknowledges the fact that, if any meaningful progress is to be made, our men and women have to complement each other. Permit me, therefore, to share with members of the General Assembly the experiences and vision of my Government.

After the Beijing Conference, the Government made a commitment to implementing four national priority areas out of the 12 critical areas. This commitment was made in recognition of the resources — human and financial —time and capacity that the Government had at its disposal. The understanding was that, while other areas are equally important, identifying the four priority areas would pave the way to a conducive environment that would allow other actors to address the other areas effectively.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In the course of implementation, the Government of Tanzania, in collaboration with stakeholders, at the outset laid down the necessary infrastructure in term of policies, strategies, programmes, institutional set-up and mechanisms for women's advancement, gender equality and the protection of women's rights. Our national development vision, which incorporates a gender perspective, states categorically that, by the year 2025, racial and gender imbalances will have been redressed, such that economic activities will not be identified with gender and race. To that effect, a women's and gender development policy has been formulated and approved by the Government. The main thrust of that policy is to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into all policies and programmes at all levels of Government, while at the same time focusing on women's specific problems. In that regard, policies in various areas have included a gender perspective component on women and gender. Strategies adopted include the establishment and strengthening of gender focal points and gender budgetary initiatives.

A number of specific activities were undertaken by the Government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society to implement the national plan of action. These included gender sensitization campaigns aimed at educating the masses on issues of women's basic human rights. Special attention was paid to the elimination of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation. Efforts were made to fight poverty by promoting community based organizations, establishing credit facilities for women, facilitating women's access to means of production, especially land, and the training of women in legal, technical, managerial and entrepreneurial skills.

Several laws affecting women were reviewed, out of which the Government has amended two areas of legislation in favour of women: the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of 1998 and the Land Law Act and Village Land Act of 1999. The Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act not only protects women and children from sexual harassment, but also provides for stiffer sentences for offenders. The land laws repeal customary and traditional practices in the ownership,

use and management of land, allowing women to have equal rights with men in the acquisition and disposal of land.

In the same spirit, the Government of Tanzania is in the process of amending other oppressive laws with the objective of making them more effective in the protection of women's human rights. The Government is also in the process of establishing a commission on human rights. The objective is to set in place a coordinated strategy for promoting human rights, including women's rights.

In terms of putting women in decision-making positions, the target is to reach at least 30 per cent by the year 2005. In 1999, the share of women ministers in the Cabinet was 11.1 per cent, for Deputy Ministers 18.7 per cent and for Permanent Secretaries 14.8 per cent. As a result of the recent amendment of the Constitution, the number of women's preferential seats in Parliament has increased from 15 to 20 per cent and in local authorities from 25 to over 30 per cent.

The Government is committed to increasing women's and girls' participation in education. This commitment is manifested in such measures as policy reforms, increased budget, increased enrolment, a conducive environment, institutional support to improve the academic performance of girls, as well as engendering curricula and textbooks.

Despite all these efforts, there have been some setbacks to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in my country. One critical obstacle is the diminishing financial capability of the Government since 1995. The debt-servicing obligation, which consumed over 40 per cent of the annual government budget in the post-Beijing era, forced a decline in spending in the social services sector, thus hampering the further advancement of women. Tanzania is hopeful that, with the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, more resources will be available for the improvement of the social services sector and infrastructure. While recognizing the opportunities offered by globalization, the international community must note the negative aspects overriding such opportunities, especially for women. In that regard, we call upon the international community to support our initiatives designed to cope with the harsh environment and to avoid further marginalization.

Another serious problem that continues to slow down our efforts is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In 1997, there were an estimated 1.5 million adults infected with HIV/AIDS in Tanzania. Since then, the figure is likely to have risen, especially for women. The severity of the problem in terms of social and economic costs is felt more now than in 1995. Then it was seen more as a health problem, whereas now the economic and development dimensions of the pandemic have been recognized. It is in this context that we call upon the international community to enhance its support for our national initiatives in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The persistent cyclical influx of refugees from neighbouring countries has continued to pose a challenge to the Government in terms of resources and infrastructure. This is an area where the international community can intervene to enhance efforts to cope with the situation, as well as to prevent and resolve armed conflicts.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the efforts made by the international community, particularly the United Nations system, in the implementation of the Platform for Action. In this regard, I would like to reiterate my Government's call on the United Nations to give priority to development programmes, in particular poverty eradication programmes addressing the feminization of poverty.

My delegation also recognizes the efforts made by institutions other than the United Nations. My Government is encouraged by the reorientation of policies by both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank towards poverty reduction measures addressing communities at the grass roots level while integrating gender specific issues. This had not been the tradition. I wish to emphasize that, if we are serious about poverty eradication, macroeconomic policies need to be effectively translated at the micro and community levels and should target women. Similarly, I would like to commend the efforts of the Commonwealth secretariat in complementing national plans of action, particularly in areas of gender mainstreaming, in gender integration into government budgets and in fighting violence against women.

In conclusion, I wish to note that the Government of Tanzania has the political will to fully implement the commitments made at Beijing. It has laid down the necessary infrastructure and continues mobilizing resources targeting the advancement of women. Hopefully, this special session of the General

Assembly will achieve consensus on modalities to increase resources to enable our Governments, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to fulfil their obligations in their endeavours to advance women for the good of our society, as agreed in Beijing.

The Acting President: (*spoke in French*):I now give the floor to Mrs. Suzanna Stanik, Minister of Justice of Ukraine.

Mrs. Stanik (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, on behalf of Ukrainian women and the Government of Ukraine, to warmly welcome this important international forum and express our best wishes for the success of its work.

We are entering a new century — the century of humanism and rule of law. Military measures for resolving human problems have been fully exhausted. There is a growing need to modernize the world by addressing global social and political changes on the basis of generally recognized moral, ethical and legal principles: democracy, human rights, equality, justice, freedom and humanism.

It is not incidental that the first special session of the General Assembly, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, is devoted to the elaboration of effective strategies for the advancement of women all over the world, the creation of appropriate living conditions for them, and the enhancement of their role in political and economic activities. The participation of women in political life is not an end in itself, however. It is based on the fact that it is women who personify the civil, moral and human approach to addressing the most complex problems of the modern world.

Five years have passed since the Beijing Conference, and gender issues have undergone fundamental changes. The historic significance of the Fourth World Conference on Women is not limited only to the elaboration by the international community of strategies in the area of the protection and promotion of the rights of women; it has also contributed to the creation of a mechanism for the strict monitoring of the implementation of these tasks.

Democratic reforms are under way in Ukraine. We believe that equality forms a basis for democracy, social justice and the safeguarding of human rights.

Women make up about 54 per cent of the population of Ukraine. Their participation in public life and their experience, intelligence, ability and willingness to work for the well-being of their nation are guarantees for the formation of a democratic civil society.

Ukraine has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thus confirming the principle of the unacceptability of discrimination against women and translating into reality the idea of the equality of women in all spheres of economic, political and public life.

In Beijing, together with the other States Members of the United Nations, we solemnly undertook commitments encompassing forward-looking national and international practices. The decisions of the World Conference on Women have been incorporated into the social development of our country. Guided by the provisions of the final documents of the Beijing Conference on Women, Ukraine has elaborated a national action plan for 1997-2000 on the advancement of women and the enhancement of their role in society, as well as a Declaration on the general principles of national policy on women and the family.

The Constitution of Ukraine ensures the equality of rights of men and women by providing women with equal opportunities in social, political and cultural activities, education and professional training, and occupation and remuneration, as well as through special measures for protecting the employment and safeguarding the health of women, the introduction of pension privileges, and the creation of conditions which provide women the opportunity to combine employment with motherhood.

To fully realize these rights, Ukraine is striving to create a national legislative base that meets international standards in the field of human rights.

The President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, and the Government of Ukraine attach great importance to the issues of the protection and promotion of the rights of women. The President's policy in reforming our society is aimed at revitalizing social relations, translating constitutional principles into reality, and establishing a culture of gender equality. A vivid example of this is the adoption by the President of Ukraine of a number of measures in the following areas: strengthening the social status of motherhood, creating favourable conditions for women to enable

them to combine their professional activities with motherhood and provide them with genuine access to all kinds of activities, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the labour market, safeguarding women's health, raising their awareness concerning their legal rights, and preventing violence against women.

Today public women's associations, in forming the institutions of civil society and in elaborating State policies, provide a powerful impetus for resolving women's problems. Currently, 29 national and more than 200 regional women's non-governmental organizations operate in Ukraine and enjoy full State support.

At the same time, the current status of women in Ukraine is affected by the changes being experienced by the Ukrainian State, which is in the process of developing a market economy and is undergoing radical changes in its economic and social structure. All the difficulties of the transition period, including social and economic hardships, are being felt particularly acutely by women.

In this regard, our State has great expectations for this forum, which will comprehensively and thoroughly analyse the situation of women in the world, focus on problems which require an urgent solution and elaborate a strategy for further actions at the national and international levels. We believe in consolidating the women's movement throughout the world. We all understand that today, without international cooperation and if we do not create the appropriate international environment, we cannot achieve noteworthy successes in the area of ensuring the rights of women.

The stabilization of the political, social and economic situation within countries and ensuring peace and security in the world depend to a large extent on the status of women in public life, on their level of awareness, their world outlook and their attitude to public and state affairs.

The Beijing Conference made a significant contribution to gender issues, addressed the most acute and important problems of women and charted the course for their resolution. I am convinced that the final documents of this special session will facilitate this process.

We have one common, wonderful home — our planet, the Earth. For the sake of our children and of future generations, we should consolidate our efforts. We have the ability to do so. We must be the wise and strong keepers of our families, our nations and our planet.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Neziha Zarrouk, Minister for Women's and Family Affairs of Tunisia.

Mrs. Zarrouk (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am very pleased, first of all, to convey to the President of the General Assembly the sincere greetings of the leadership, the Government and the people of Tunisia and to congratulate him on his election. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his introductory statement.

This session assumes paramount importance since it is devoted to an appraisal and follow-up of the achievements made since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing and to consider ways to strengthen this process in the future so that the year 2000 will be a starting point for a new approach to addressing equality, development and peace through full commitment and constructive cooperation to realize gender equality.

There is no doubt that regardless of how different our points of view may be on some issues, the question of eradicating all forms of discrimination against women remains in essence a common issue that consecrates the unity of the human values of equality, peace and progress. Despite our cultural and ethnic differences we are seeking to find common approaches and formulas that can translate our principles into reality and turn them into practices and codes of conduct within each and every society.

The promotion of all aspects of the status of women has been given undivided attention in Tunisia. The promulgation of the Personal Status Code immediately after independence in 1956 was reinforced following the change of 7 November 1987, within the framework of a reformist vision that confirmed the success of the Tunisian approach of reconciling national heritage with modernity and harmonizing cultural and social particularities with universal values. The process of the advancement of Tunisian women has been characterized by recognition of women's rights as an integral part of human rights and by the inclusion of the efforts to improve women's conditions

in a strategic vision based on planning according to social classes. The integration of women into the development process and the achievement of gender equality became strategic objectives of national development.

A Commission on Women and Development was established in 1991, and a woman-specific strategy was integrated into the eighth national plan, for 1992-1998. In doing this, Tunisia pioneered the adoption of the gender approach, which subsequently figured among the most important recommendations of the Beijing Conference. Accordingly, Tunisia set up several mechanisms and adopted many important procedures and programmes. It established the Centre for Studies, Research, Documentation and Information on Women in 1991 and created a governmental structure for women's and family affairs and a National Council on Women and Family in 1992.

It further promulgated pioneering legislation in this area, such as in the adoption of non-discrimination as a basic constitutional principle and in the consolidation of women's fundamental and individual rights within the family and society. Tunisia firmly established the principle of equality and partnership in personal status and in the various forms of social and civil transactions. Examples of this are the abolition of the duty of obedience, which was assigned to the wife alone, the replacement of this duty with the principle of mutual respect and the strengthening of women's position in the area of guardianship and the management of children's affairs.

Similarly, the Alimony and Divorce Annuity Guarantee Fund was established, laws were promulgated to deter violence in marital life and to enable a Tunisian woman married to a foreign national to transmit her nationality to her children. The principle of non-discrimination between men and women in all fields of employment and economic transactions was explicitly and unequivocally adopted. Such procedures have constantly been enhanced by developing legislation and the removal of all manifestations of discrimination against women from it, as well as by firm and effective political will and reliance on the principle of legal interpretation. These processes have been made more systematic and more effective by developing a national plan of action in favour of women, drawn up within the Commission on Women and Development and in partnership with governmental organizations and various components of society.

Tunisia has made great headway in promoting equal opportunity between the sexes in most sectors. Efforts have focused on further strengthening the legislative code and ridding it of all forms of discrimination against women. Suffice it here to recall some of the achievements made recently, such as the promulgation of the law on joint ownership, which enhanced the principle of partnership within the family and established a progressive and highly civilized view of marital relations. I would also like to cite the removal of all forms of discrimination against women from the code of commitments and contracts and the impetus given to the Ministry of Women's and Family Affairs at the organizational and structural level, as well as at the financial level: there was a 60 per cent increase in the Ministry's development budget between 1996 and 1999. The National Council on Women and Family was also strengthened by establishing specialized committees to ensure equal opportunity and to monitor the portrayal of women in the mass media. The Centre for Studies, Research, Documentation and Information on Women was further supported in order to provide accurate information on women.

At the programme level, there is a new mechanism to support women's productive activities, which operates within the framework of national programmes such as the Tunisian Solidarity Bank and the National Employment Fund. The mechanism operates in partnership with associations for the promotion of women's small-scale enterprises, whether in urban or rural areas. This has provided women with access to resources in order to encourage them to undertake entrepreneurial projects and become integrated into the economic cycle.

Another national plan was created for rural Tunisian women and was implemented in full partnership with development associations. This plan is aimed at activating the productive capabilities of rural women and protecting women and girls in rural areas from being marginalized or falling into poverty.

With regard to enhancing the rights of women, the Tunisian State was very keen to promote the Alimony and Divorce Annuity Guarantee Fund. The Fund is fully operative and serves as an example of Tunisian achievements in this respect. This is also reflected in the many indicators of advances already

achieved for Tunisian women and the degree to which Tunisian women benefit from economic, social and human development programmes. The proportion of girls from ages 6 to 12 who attend schools increased from 79 per cent in 1987 to 91.5 per cent in 1998. Girls' school attendance at the various levels of secondary and higher education is on a par with that of boys and even higher in certain fields and courses of study.

Women's life expectancy has risen from 51 years in 1966 to 73.6 at present. The proportion of working women has increased from 21 per cent in 1995 to 25 per cent at present, not counting the number of women in the informal sector. Women's participation in different areas of public life and decision-making positions has undergone appreciable progress.

The representation of women has increased from 7 per cent in 1995 to 11.5 per cent at present in the Chamber of Deputies, and from 17 per cent to over 21 per cent in local government councils following the recent elections held in May 2000. Moreover, 13 per cent of cabinet ministers are women.

The experiences of the last three decades, from the 1975 Mexico conference through the 1995 Beijing conference to date, confirm that fulfilment of women's aspirations to equality, well-being and progress lies in achieving a delicate balance between peace, security and stability on the one hand, and comprehensive and interdependent development on the other. We cannot continue to address these issues with conventional methods and a parochial outlook, especially at this juncture of history, which is marked by interdependent relations, intertwined interests and the disappearance of regional and international barriers. Hence the need to strengthen all forms of international solidarity, intensify cooperation, reinforce programmes of equal partnership between North and South and consider the development of conditions for women as a major factor to that end. While applauding the appeal by Mr. Kofi Annan for the allocation by the developed countries of 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product for overall official development assistance to developing countries with a view to investing in development projects in support of women, I emphasize the need for action to promote effective cooperation among the countries of the South that will be consistent with their needs, interests and common destiny.

What is desirable, or indeed required, as we embark upon a new century is for humanity to rid itself once and for all of the injustices inherent, in particular, in the spread of poverty, disease and illiteracy, the alarming extent of unemployment, the degradation of the environment and the exacerbation of the debt burden. These are all scourges that beset the countries of the South in particular; they affect women more than they do others. This calls for a greater understanding of the values of solidarity and a greater awakening of the human conscience to address these vital issues.

Is it conceivable today, in a shrinking world that has become no more than a global village, to opt for selective means to address problems of development? How can we expect noble universal values to prevail without a serious effort to translate such values into reality and bring them from the realm of good intentions into the realm of action-oriented commitment? The appeal made by His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali for the creation of a world solidarity fund is but one expression of the human aspiration to relations based on equality, interdependent development and good governance, and to the achievement of peace and prosperity for all.

Today more than ever before, there is a pressing need to combat all forms of marginalization and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in a global and comprehensive human context. We are convinced that the transformations that have taken place over the past few years have made the cause of women a cause without frontiers. It is therefore our duty to re-examine the scope of what is possible and to reflect constantly in a creative and forward-looking manner so as to enhance the role of women in the process of development and democratization as an important factor in economic production and in the improvement of family living standards. That would help consolidate political and social justice and stability at the national, regional and international levels.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.